DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 445 CS 007 021

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TITLE The Basic "How To's" for Validating a Study Skills Inventory.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the North Central Reading Association (25th, Flint, MI, October 22-23, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Nontraditional Students; *Reading Research; *Reading Skills; Reading Tests; Student Reaction; Study Habits; *Study Skills; *Test Validity
IDENTIFIERS College Reading and Study Skills Inventory

ABSTRACT

To find out what study skills were used by successful students at an urban commuter school whose primary degree program is business, the College Reading and Study Skills (CRSS) inventory was validated on 150 students. First the CRSS inventory was evaluated and revised slightly. The language of the statements was made positive and jargon free. The 48 statements were adapted to a five-point frequency-of-use scale ranging from "almost always" to "don't know." One open-ended question was included for respondents to reveal study skills not listed on the inventory. Subjects were selected according to the following criteria: 3.3 or better grade point average at the end of the fall term, enrollment in the spring term, completion of at least 60 credit hours, and bachelor's degree candidacy in the College of Business and Public Administration. Results of the validation project indicated that while the group did read textbooks adequately, they considered their thorough and organized class notetaking and follow-up study to be even more significant. Self-control was noted as crucial to their success because it enabled them to manage time, maintain interest in courses, keep up to date, and plan ahead for exams and special projects. These students also indicated that they could select and learn what was important in a course. Besides those skills related to day-to-day course work, the group also professed confidence in their library research and writing skills. Finally, the group proved to be readers. In spite of their schedules, most regularly read newspapers, magazines, and books. (HOD)

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ED227445

The Basic "How To's" for Validating A Study Skills Inventory

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This project arose from a need to find out just what study skills are utilized by successful students at Franklin University, an urban commuter school whose primary degree program is business. This paper explains the process by which a study skills inventory was validated on that population. Results of the validation indicated that while most of the students utilized a broad range of study skills, they particularly valued their listening/note-taking skill and their careful exam preparation.

What academic reading and learning skills does a student need to know? The answer to this question seems easy to determine. Simply administer a study skills inventory, compare the results with the norm, and then organize a plan to enhance strengths and remediate or minimize weaknesses.

But what can be done when the normative population is significantly different from the student population? Such is the case when either the California Study Method Survey or the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes -- Brown-Holtzman is used with non-traditional students. Wilson (1967) recommends the California for ages 12 - 18 and the Brown-Holtzman for ages 14 - 21. The average age at Franklin University, for example is 26. Besides age, our students are different from traditional college students in lifestyle and family background. Whereas traditional college students tend to focus their lives on school, our students balance work, family, and school responsibilities. Also, most of our students come from families in which parents did not attend college. Finally, most of our students did not follow a college preparatory curriculum. Thus, the differences between the normative and non-traditional student populations may be great enough to call into question the validity of these inventories for non-traditional students.

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Consequently, we undertook the present project to discover what were the study skills of good students at our institution.

We already had an inventory in hand, one based on objectives of our course, College Reading and Study Skills (CRSS), so the task was simply to validate it. We followed the guidelines suggested by Van Dalen (1966).

First the CRSS inventory was evaluated and revised slightly. The language of the statements was made positive and jargon-free. The 48 statements were adapted to a five-point frequency-of-use scale ranging from "almost always" to "don't know." One open-ended question was included so there might be a way for respondents to reveal study skills not listed on the inventory. Directions were simply worded, and overall the inventory was organized to flow logically from one topic to another. Average completion time was about 20 minutes.

A non-traditional Franklin University population was selected to validate the inventory. That group was selected according to these criteria:

a) 3.3 or better GPA at the end of the fall 1981 term,

b) enrolled in spring 1982 term,

c) completed at least 60 credit hours by the end of fall 1981 term,

d) bachelor's degree candidates in the College of Business and Public Administration.

From the university data base an alphabetical list of about 300 students was generated; a random selection of 150 students was then made.

Even while selection of the population was proceeding, methods of distributing material and ensuring a good return were being considered. Expense and poor return rate ruled out mailing. Gathering everyone in one place was impossible with a commuter group. Finally, it seemed easiest to distribute materials through colleagues. At Franklin most full-time faculty and often even adjuncts are willing to make announcements and to promote each other's causes. So with a cover letter

attached to explain the project and solicit cooperation, bundles of envelopes were prepared for distribution to colleagues who in turn were to give them to the selected students in their classes. Each envelope contained another letter explaining the project and encouraging the student's participation, the inventory, and an answer sheet.

A simple hand tabulation system was organized so that a work-study student could record responses to the statements on the inventory. Plans were made for grouping and counting responses to the open-ended question, despite no one knowing what responses to expect.

Of the 150 sets of materials distributed, 82 (55%) were returned and tabulated. Percentages were calculated for each of the responses for the 48 statements. Responses to the open-ended question were recorded in one of two ways. The open-ended question asked "What is the most important thing a student should know about reading/study skills?" Therefore, many responses were restatements of skills already on the inventory. These were easily sorted and tallied. Other responses which did not match inventory items were put into general categories: text reading, listening/notetaking, memory, exam preparation, time management, classroom behavior, and commitment to school.

Results of the validation project indicated that while the validation group did read textbooks adequately, they considered their thorough and organized class notetaking and follow-up study to be even more significant. They responded both to statements in the inventory and to the open-ended question that self-control was crucial to their success because it enabled them to manage time, stimulate interest in courses, keep up to date, and plan ahead for exams and special projects. These students also indicated strongly that they can select and learn what is important in a course. It was obvious that these students are what we might call "pluggers." They feel education is important, and they focus their energy and time consistently

to carry out that commitment. In fact, only 1 of the 82 responded in a matter-of-fact way that learning was no particular challenge because he always "got it the first time."

Besides those skills related to day-to-day coursework, the validation group also professed confidence in their library research and writing skills. Finally, and not suprisingly, the group proved to be readers. In spite of their crowded schedules, most regularly read newspapers, magazines, and books.

Results of the validation have been used in several ways. The project enabled us to answer that nagging question, "What study skills do students need?" We did find out how important are the various study skills to our students. Consequently, we adjusted the topics and assignments within CRSS to provide stronger training in listening/notetaking and exam preparation. Perhaps most interesting of all is the fact that we gained silent partners in our educational enterprise. When we say, "Our good, experienced students wanted to tell you..," we know there is a unique kind of encouragement for our beginning students.

As with any worthwhile research project, the validation spawned other projects. Responses of beginning students in CRSS are now compared to those of the validation group. Also pre-CRSS and post-CRSS shifts on the inventory have been documented. Finally, the inventory was validated with a diploma nursing school population.

Clearly, even those who teach in undergraduate institutions, working with a minimum of university support, can carry out and benefit from research. The opportunities are particularly numerous for those of us who work with non-traditional or unique student populations.

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